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ABSTRACT

The study examines and compares free/spontaneous play behaviors of 20 Hispanic (from Ponce, Puerto Rico) and 20 Anglo (from State College, Pennsylvania) 5-year-old children from middle class socioeconomic strata. Within each of the groups there were 10 boys and 10 girls. Each child was observed in a group play setting in four observational sessions over a 2-week period. The same predetermined observation order was used for each child across sessions. Each of the four sessions was 5 minutes long and contained 10 time blocks of 30-second intervals of actual observation accompanied by 10 seconds of recording. Findings suggested that differences exist between cultures, sexes, play types, and observations/trials. Results showed that: (1) Hispanic girls used more reality-oriented play than Anglo girls; (2) Hispanic boys showed greater amounts of simple/functional play than Anglo boys; and (3) Anglo boys showed significantly more fantasy play than Hispanic boys. Variability within and across play observations/trials among Hispanic children was significant. (Author/RH)

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COMPARISONS OF FREE PLAY BEHAVIORS OF HISPANIC AND ANGLO MIDDLE CLASS SES FIVE YEAR OLDS

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Title: COMPARISONS OF FREE PLAY BEHAVIORS OF HISPANIC AND ANGLO MIDDLE CLASS SES FIVE YEAR OLDS

ABSTRACT

The study examines and compares free/spontaneous play behaviors of 20 Hispanic and 20 Anglo five year old children from middle class socioeconomic strata. Within each of 20 participants there were 10 boys and 10 girls. Each child was observed in a group play setting in four observational sessions over a two-week period. The same predetermined observation order was used for each child across sessions. Each of the four sessions was five minutes in length and contained 10 time blocks of 30-second intervals of actual observation accompanied by 10 seconds of recording. The factorial ANOVR indicated several interesting findings. For example, and for ABK interaction: (1) Hispanic girls yielded significantly higher reality-oriented play scores than Anglo girls (at reality-oriented play); (2) Hispanic boys yielded significantly higher simple play scores than Anglo boys (at the same play type); and, (3) Anglo boys had significantly greater fantasy play scores than Hispanic boys (at the same play type).

Comparisons of Free Play Behaviors of Hispanic and Anglo Middle Class SES Five Year Olds

Summary

The study examines and compares free/spontaneous play behaviors of Hispanic and Anglo five year old children from middle class socioeconomic strata (SES). There were 40 participants enrolled in the study and ranged in age from 5.1 to 5.8 with a mean age of 5.6 years. Twenty children, 10 girls and 10 boys, were from Ponce, Puerto Rico and represented an Hispanic sample. Another 20 children, 10 girls and 10 boys, ranging in age of 5.1 to 5.7 had a mean age of 5.4 years. They were from State College, Pennsylvania and represented an Anglo Sample.

Both groups represented middle class SES populations using the Warner, Meeker and Eels (1960) occupational-status index. Children from both Hispanic and Anglo groups had parents who were primarily engaged in white collar occupations such as secretaries, armed services, teachers and college students.

Procedures

Observations of the children's free play were made independently by two raters in preschool settings in each of the two cultures. Both Hispanic raters were male and the Angle raters were female. All were university students matriculating toward undergraduate and graduate degrees. The raters were trained by the authors of the present study in a three hour training session prior to the actual observations. During training all raters reached a minimum level of 80% agreement in coding children's play behaviors.

Each child was observed in a group setting in four observation sessions over a two-week period. Each was observed in a predetermined order. The total amount of actual observation time per child was 20 minutes. Each of the four sessions were five minutes in length and contained 10 time blocks of 30 second intervals of actual observation. Excluded from the five minutes of actual observation time period was 10 seconds of recording which followed each of the 30 second observation intervals. The same procedures of observing for 30 seconds then recording for 10 seconds

within each five minute observation sessions and across the four sessions were followed within both Hispanic and Anglo preschool settings.

Coding System

The spontaneous play behaviors were coded using the Play Observation Scale (POS) (Yawkey, 1982, 1983). The 17 category POS reflects both frequency and developmental level of children's free play and is based on and are elaborations of Fein's (1975, 1981), McCune-Nicholich's (1977), Piaget's (1962) and Smilansky's (1968) ideas and coding systems. Arranged in a developmental hierarchy, the POS items comprise and detail pretent growth categories.

Embedded within the POS are three hierarchical levels of spontaneous play: simple/functional, fantasy and reality-oriented play. Simple/functional play, comprising categories one to six, focuses on motor and language movements repeated by trial and error and intention. The fantasy play level, comprising categories seven to 11, involves make-believe elements, behaviors and actions. The reality-oriented play levels, comprising categories 12 to 17, focuses on the reproductions of concrete reality scenes which show cohesiveness and organization of thought processes and products.

Reliability

In previous studies (Gomez, 1982, 1983; Jones, 1984) and in the present investigation, the reliability of the POS was established. The POS reliabilities in Gomez's (1982, 1983) studies with four year old Hispanic children ranged from .80 to .96 with a mean of .90 between two raters. In the Jones (1984) study, the POS reliabilities ranged from .74 to .85 with a mean of .81 with six raters.

In the present study, reliability was determined by calculating the number of agreements divided by the number of agreements plus the number of disagreements times 100 (Rosenburg, 1981) for all observations within cultures. Between the two Hispanic raters, the reliability ranged from .81 to .91 with a mean of .89. Between

the two Anglo raters, scoring the Anglo children, the reliability ranged from .88 to .97 with a mean of .95.

Results

Analyses of group data were made in an attempt to compare spontaneous play behaviors between cultures and gender and using play types and observations. Accordingly, an analysis of variance (ANOVR) was performed on play scores derived from the POS using a 2 (cultures) x 2 (gender) model as between subjects' independent variables and 3 types of play (simple/functional, fantasy, reality-oriented) crossed with 4 play observation (one through four) as repeated measures' variables (Winer, 1962).

The results of the 2 x 2 x 3 x 4 ANOVR indicated significant effects of within subjects' factors for: (1) cultures (A) by gender (B) by play types (K) or ABK interaction ($F=9.80$, $df=2,216$, $p = .003$); and, (2) culture (A) by observation trials (J) by play types (K) or AJK interactions.

First, for ABK interaction, (A) at given levels of BK, the results are:

1. Hispanic girls yielded significantly higher reality-oriented play scores than Anglo girls (at reality-oriented play),
2. Hispanic boys yielded significantly higher simple play scores than Anglo boys (at the same play type),
3. Anglo boys had significantly greater fantasy play scores than Hispanic boys (at the same play type).

For clarification and for B at given levels of AK the results follow:

1. Anglo boys had significantly greater simple play scores than Hispanic girls (at the same play type),
2. Anglo girls showed significantly higher simple play scores than Anglo boys (at the same play type).

Finally, for K at given levels of AB, the results were:

1. Hispanic girls yielded significantly higher simple play scores than Hispanic girls at reality-oriented play,
2. Hispanic boys yielded significantly higher simple play scores than Hispanic boys at fantasy play as well as reality-oriented play,
3. Anglo girls and boys yielded significantly higher simple play scores than Anglo girls and boys at reality-oriented play and Anglo girls and boys yielded significantly greater fantasy scores than Anglo girls and boys at reality-oriented play.

Second, for the AJK interaction, A at given levels of JK, the results are:

1. Hispanic children yielded significantly greater simple play scores at observation/trial 1 than Anglo children (at simple play level at observation/trial 1),
2. Anglo children yielded significantly greater fantasy play scores at observation/trial 2 than Hispanic children (at the same play level and at observation/trial 2),
3. Anglo children showed significantly more simple play at observation/trial 2 than Hispanic children (at simple play at observation/trial 2),
4. Hispanic children showed significantly more reality-oriented play at observation/trial 2 than Anglo children (at reality-oriented play at trial 2).

For J at given levels of AK, the results follow:

1. Hispanic children at observation/trial 1 yielded significantly more simple play than at observations,/trials 2, 3, and 4 (at simple play) and Hispanic children at observation/trial 4 yielded significantly more simple play than at observation/trial 2 (at simple play).
2. Hispanic children at observations/trials 2, 3, and 4 yielded significantly more fantasy play than at observation/trial 1 (at fantasy play),

3. Hispanic children at observation/trial 4 yielded significantly more reality-oriented play than at observation/trials I and 2 (at fantasy play),
4. Anglo children did not differ significantly within observations and play types.

For K at given levels of AJ, the results follow:

1. Hispanic children at observation/trial I yielded significantly more simple play than fantasy and reality-oriented play (at observation/trial I),
2. Hispanic children at observation/trial 3 yielded significantly more simple play than reality-oriented play (at observation/trial 3),
3. Hispanic children at observation/trial 4 yielded significantly more simple play than reality-oriented play (at observation/trial 4) and Hispanic children at observation/trial 4 yielded more fantasy play than reality-oriented play (at observation/trial 4),
4. Anglo children at observations/trials 2 and 4 yielded significantly more simple play than reality-oriented play (at observations/trials 2 and 4) and Anglo children at observations/trials 2 and 4 yielded significantly more fantasy than reality-oriented play (at observations/trials 2 and 4).
5. Anglo children at observation/trial 3 yielded significantly higher levels of simple play than reality-oriented play (at observation/trial 3) and Anglo children at observation/trial 3 yielded significantly higher fantasy than reality-oriented play at observation/trial 3.

Some Observations/Conclusions

The analyses suggest differences between cultures, boys and girls, play types and observations/trials. From the set of results, there are several of interest.

First, Hispanic girls used more reality-oriented play than Anglo girls and Hispanic boys showed greater amounts of simple/functional play than Anglo boys. However, Anglo boys showed significantly more fantasy play than Hispanic boys.

Within the Hispanic culture, there may be a strong press for sex role development shown by greater amounts of simple/functional play and manipulative movements for boys while for girls reality-based play activity appear more frequently than for boys and girls in the Anglo culture, respectively.

Second, the variability within and across play observations/trials in the Hispanic children with or without comparison to the Anglo children is most striking. In observation session 1 compared to observations 2 and 4 within the Hispanic culture, the Hispanic children markedly differed. Perhaps, the Hispanic children became more accustomed to the presence of the two male raters in observations 2 through 4 than in observation 1. Regardless of the reason/s for this apparent variability in the Hispanic children, the data could be re-analyzed and run on observation/trials 2 through 4 while using observation 1as a warm-up observation across cultures. These re-analyses may provide some additional insight into the pretend play actions of children in Hispanic and Anglo cultures.

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